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# COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

by W. O. LESTER SMITH

UNESCO



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**STUDIES ON COMPULSORY EDUCATION. VI**  
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*Published by United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
19 avenue Kléber, Paris-16  
1st impression, 1951  
2nd impression, 1952  
Printed by Imprimerie Chantenay  
Copyright 1951 by Unesco, Paris*



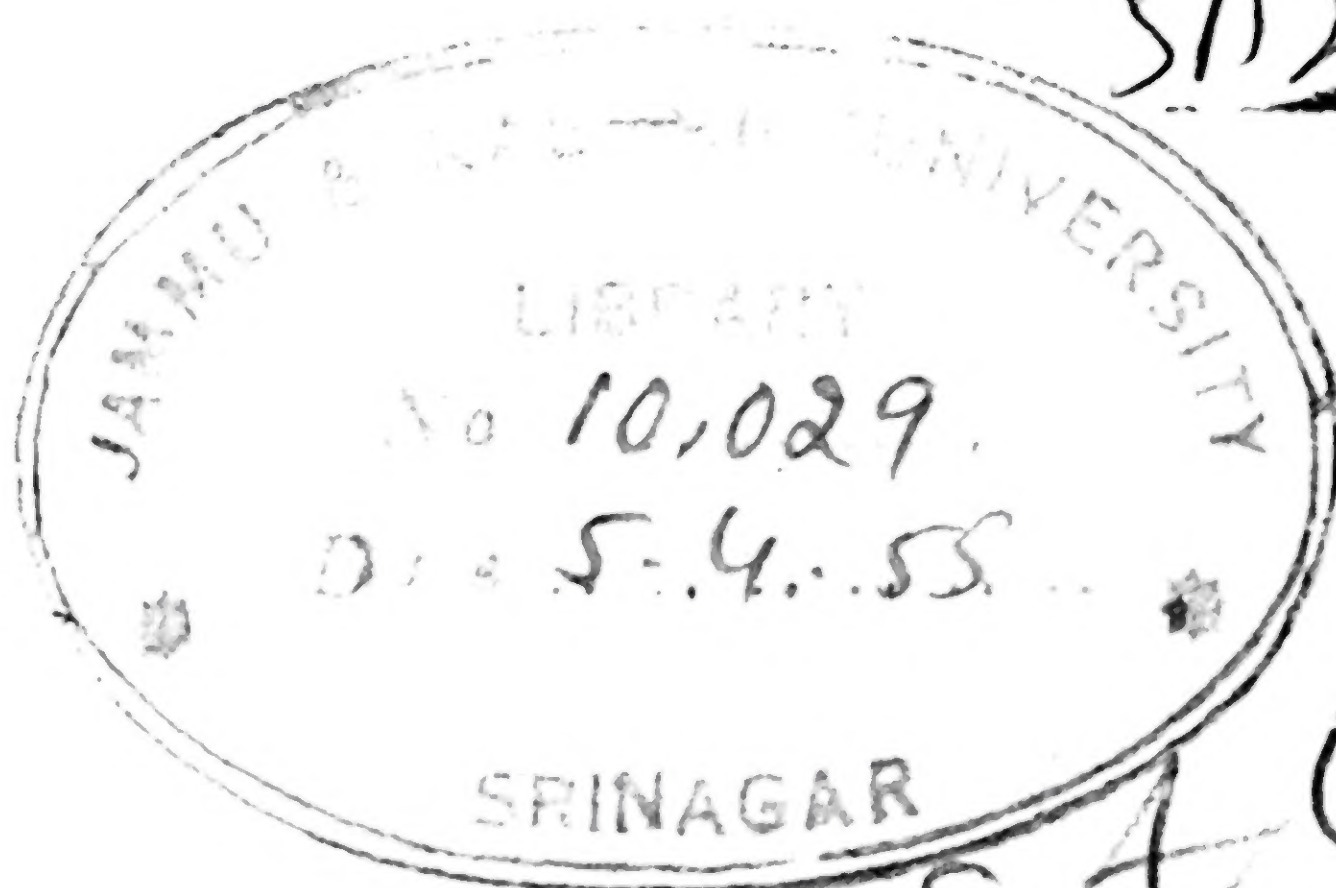
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## PREFACE

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This study by Professor Lester Smith forms part of a group planned by Unesco in an effort to clarify the problems of compulsory, free and universal schooling, and published as a uniform series of booklets.

Some information about the plan may interest the reader. For adequate background to discussion, case-studies of a number of individual countries have been made: England, France and Australia represent States which have achieved compulsory education through widely differing methods of administration; Ecuador, Iraq and Thailand are States which face different stages of the problem and are seeking solutions of their own. Besides these national studies, there are broad issues requiring treatment by the comparative method. Two have been selected for inclusion at this stage: the relation of child labour to compulsory schooling, and the problem of raising the school-leaving age.

In the study on England, Professor Lester Smith has dealt briefly with the historical progress towards compulsory education and more fully with the English system as it now stands. A somewhat similar treatment will be found in the volumes on France and Australia, but with the variations to be expected where each author is examining his subject independently, and is free to express his own interpretation of the facts. In all three countries, the achievement of universal compulsory education has brought to the fore another problem, the extension of the period of schooling, which cannot be isolated from the main point of the enquiry.

These studies have an immediate application in the Fourteenth Annual Conference on Public Education, organized jointly by Unesco and the International Bureau of Education in Geneva in July 1951. A major part of the discussion at the conference will be directed to the problem of compulsory education. It is hoped that the publication of these booklets in advance of the conference will stimulate interest in the matter; and that at a later date educators will find in the series as a whole valuable sources of information for their own planning and practice.



## **AUTHOR'S FOREWORD**

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I am greatly indebted to Dr. Matta Akrawi for valuable advice and encouragement in preparing this brief study of compulsory education in England; and to the Manchester Local Education Authority for kindly providing me with material illustrative of modern administration practice in regard to school attendance.

W. O. L. S.



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# INTRODUCTION

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'The English', it has been said, 'never clean their slates'; our past is always there influencing our present, making us adjust, adapt, and modify without too much regard for consistency or logic. Thus most of our institutions and conventions bear the splinter marks of their history; and what may be revolution elsewhere with us becomes reconstruction. As our Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, said the other day, we are rather good at pouring new wine into old bottles without bursting them. For such reasons as these, you cannot really understand the English attitude to compulsory education unless you are prepared to take a brief excursion into the past. But so that this may be as short as possible, let us confine it to a hurried historical glance at: (a) our attitude to State intervention in education; (b) our regard for religious freedom; (c) our respect for individual opinion. Incidentally it should be said that our queer educational terminology makes nonsense to anyone unfamiliar with its origin; and this backward glance will also serve the purpose of shedding some light upon its derivation.

## OUR ATTITUDE TO STATE INTERVENTION IN EDUCATION

Two factors have combined to make us 'touchy' or sensitive about Government interference in educational affairs; first, the legacy of mistrust about the control of education bequeathed to us by the seventeenth century, and secondly, the long reign of the economic doctrine of *laissez-faire*.

In the seventeenth century we had our Civil War, in which Government control of education, though not an overt issue, was a very real cause of the sectarian strife. First the Anglicans and then the Puritans sought to establish a church-state, each of them in turn using education as a means of propagating their particular view of religion and society. This conception of a church-state dominating education was even transported to North America, and English colonists there, having emigrated to avoid persecution at home, sought to shape across the Atlantic



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new societies true to their ideology. Some indeed pursued their ideals with considerable bigotry, and one of their weapons was universal compulsory education. Hence the Massachusetts Acts of 1642 and 1648, which became models for all the New England colonies except Rhode Island. This legislation scarcely survived into the eighteenth century, but because of the bigotry with which it was sometimes administered it lent support to the opinion that was growing in England that government and education was not a good mixture.

As the seventeenth century drew to a close, the factious elements in England found themselves in an atmosphere of war-weariness. Sectarian strife continued but it ceased to be militant; or as our historian, Trevelyan, puts it, the Anglicans and Puritans lay down and snarled 'like dogs that have been flogged off each other'. There followed our almost bloodless revolution of 1688, and gradually there was built up throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries an educational policy founded on toleration. The outstanding characteristic of this policy was that it regarded education, not as a responsibility of the State, but as a service to be rendered by voluntary and private enterprise. Under such a policy, anything in the nature of compulsory education was impracticable.

From about 1780 onwards this policy was strongly reinforced and buttressed by the doctrine of *laissez-faire*. Originating with Adam Smith as an economic creed, it developed in the hands of some of his followers into a political philosophy applicable to society at large. By this time England had become a populous industrial nation, and it was largely because of the dominance of *laissez-faire* that she denied herself at a critical phase in her social history those public services that had become essential to national well-being.

## REGARD FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND INDIVIDUAL OPINION

There was in our civil strife of the seventeenth century an important element, the belief in religious freedom and liberty of conscience. This doctrine finds expression in the writings of John Milton, and in some of the sayings of its great leader, Oliver Cromwell: e.g., 'This law and this word speaking within us which truly is in every man which hath the spirit of God, we are to have regard to.' In opposition to the passion for uniformity, characteristic of the Anglicans and Puritans, these Separatists, as they are sometimes called, advanced a new gospel of diversity, that is to say tolerance for a variety of creeds and respect for each man's opinion.

This belief in diversity has had a considerable influence on our educational development, and through the genius of John Locke it was converted into a political philosophy which was the basis of liberal thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Tolerance was its key-note; its weakness was that it encouraged at times a negative attitude to pressing social problems. One of its chief exponents in the political sphere was Walpole, the eighteenth-century Prime Minister, who, when action was demanded, was fond of saying: 'Let sleeping dogs lie.'

This passive political attitude led to education being regarded as entirely the concern of philanthropy, of voluntary and private enterprise. Benevolence became a great middle-class virtue. The growing wealth of the country led to the rise of a mercantile and manufacturing caste; and in comfortable homes the view was widely held that a good personal income involved responsibilities, and that these were best discharged when directed to the alleviation of the lot of the poor. Schools of many kinds were established by such generosity: charity schools, night schools, schools for ragged children, and Sunday schools. The latter were founded largely because Sunday was the only day on which children engaged in employment could be expected to attend. Attendance was inevitably irregular and haphazard, and secured mainly by moral pressure and the influence of the employer.

#### EDUCATION BY VOLUNTARY SOCIETIES

At the beginning of the nineteenth century a great attempt was made to canalize and concentrate this philanthropy; and it looked as if the Church of England and the Dissenting Churches would unite in a concerted effort to provide a national system of elementary education on a voluntary basis. But discord soon prevented such co-operation, and two Voluntary Societies were founded, one representative of the Church of England and the other of Dissent. In 1829 the Catholics were emancipated by law from disabilities they had long suffered, and thus they also were able to provide voluntary schools. Other religious bodies joined in the effort to meet the growing need for elementary education, but it was early realized that voluntary finance alone would be unequal to the task. In 1833 therefore the Government began a practice of making annual grants to the various voluntary societies, and this led to the establishment of a small central Education Department which was the beginning of what is now the Ministry of Education. But by 1870 it had become all too clear that a national system of education could not be constructed by voluntary enterprise, even when subsidized by the State.



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The education that was being provided was very restricted in scope and was of poor quality; and worse still, there were thousands of children receiving no schooling at all.

We paid heavily for this prolonged reliance upon voluntary initiative; for year after year population had been increasing and the workers had been crowding in growing numbers into the new and unplanned towns. A few statistics will illustrate the magnitude of the task that had accumulated, and the urgency of the problems that had to be solved. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the total population of England and Wales was about five and a half million, by 1800 it had become nearly nine million, by 1870 it had risen to twenty-two million and since then it has approximately doubled. It was calculated in 1870 that only two-fifths of the children between the ages of six and ten were in the voluntary schools, and only one-third of those between ten and twelve. In Liverpool, to give the example of one city, there were 80,000 children who ought to be receiving education, but of these 20,000 were not attending any school, while at least another 20,000 were attending schools where the education was not worth having. Throughout the country attendance was irregular, and there were a great many children who attended only on two or three days a week or for a few weeks in the year.

Such was the critical situation that confronted Parliament when it was considering the complicated measure which, when enacted, became the Education Act of 1870 and the foundation of our educational system. Members, as they made their speeches and cast their vote on this clause and that, had to have regard not only to the urgent need for schools and teachers but also to many opinions and presuppositions that had their roots deep in our history. Especially had they to remember not only the tragic plight of thousands of children but also the various standpoints of the Churches, the traditional respect for the consciences of individual parents, and above all the Englishman's dislike of interference with his personal freedom.

'England is a free country' says Elie Halévy, the French historian, at the close of his *History of the English People*; and he reminds his readers that they must constantly remember this if they wish to understand us. It means, he adds, that 'England is a country of voluntary obedience, of an organization freely initiated and freely accepted'. This helps to explain the intricacy of our Education Acts, our queer religious compromise, our tolerant administration, and our respect for the wishes of parents. It also furnishes the clue to our cautious approach to the problem of compulsory education.

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE ELEMENTARY EDUCATION ACT OF 1870 AND SUBSEQUENT TRENDS

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The crucial issue in the stormy debates which preceded the passage of this great statute was religion. Without an acceptable compromise on that, there could be no agreement on a national system nor any move towards compulsory education. The essentials of the settlement were hammered out on the anvil of discussion, and they were (a) a dual system of voluntary and local authority schools, and (b) meticulous safeguards about conscience. Under the dual system 'the voluntary schools' belonging to the various churches were recognized and encouraged, but 'to fill the gaps' they were to be supplemented by 'board schools' to be provided by local authorities elected for the purpose and called School Boards.

Conscience was safeguarded by two elaborate clauses. One prevented a child's attendance at religious worship or a religious lesson in any school, voluntary or board school, if his parent or guardian objected; and to facilitate the withdrawal of children from religious worship or lessons, when parents had so requested, it was decided that this part of the curriculum should be restricted to a fixed time at the beginning or end of a session. The other clause affecting conscience stipulated that no distinctive teaching particular to any Church should be taught in any board school.

This compromise has worked so well in practice and proved so generally acceptable that the dual system continues to this day, and the provisions for the safeguarding of conscience still operate, except that in the Education Act of 1944 the restriction as to the time when religious teaching may be given has been removed. It was found that in practice such a restriction was educationally unsound; for when all children had to receive their religious teaching at one and the same time, they often had to be taught by teachers who had not made a special study of the subject matter of the religious syllabus. The practice of opening the school day with a collective act of worship became so general that the Education Act of 1944 made this a legal obligation, subject to the parent's right to withdraw his child if he did not wish him to participate.



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### THE ARGUMENTS ABOUT COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN 1870

When the Parliament of 1870 had accepted this compromise about religious teaching, the decks were clear for a dispassionate consideration of the question of compulsory education. The Government had wisely seen to it that the long and elaborate clause about school attendance (Clause 74, Elementary Education Act 1870) came towards the end of the Bill. Members were therefore able to discuss the problem as a comparatively straightforward issue, and decide without religious controversy the plain question whether parents should be compelled to send their children to school.

The Government, while accepting the principle of compulsory education, favoured a gradual approach. It proposed that the new School Boards should be empowered to make a local law (or as we say, a bye-law) in their districts, requiring children between the ages of five and thirteen to attend school. The Education Department would consider and approve these bye-laws, which would indicate the times at which the children would attend and any conditions for exemption. Thus Parliament was asked to agree to a permissive application of the principle of compulsion at the discretion of each School Board.

There was a long debate during which many arguments for and against compulsion were advanced. Englishmen generally find an innovation more acceptable if it can be shown that it is not entirely new—that there is a precedent for it; and they also like to try it out on a limited scale before committing themselves completely. This empiric instinct was largely satisfied by the proposal to give the School Boards the option of adopting the principle or not; this would ensure that in districts best able to carry it out compulsion would get a fair trial, and thus useful experience would be gained. As for a precedent, the advocates of compulsion sought to prove that this could be found in the Factory Acts, and that its operation in that limited sense had proved that it yielded beneficial results. The first effective Act of this kind was the Factory Act of 1833, passed after a Royal Commission had investigated the conditions of child labour in textile mills and had produced a report that shocked public opinion. This Act excluded children under nine from these mills, and limited the hours of work of those between nine and thirteen to forty-eight hours a week, requiring also that every one of them should attend school for two hours a day. Similar Acts had followed for other industries, and during the debate members were able to claim that already 85,000 children were receiving

part-time schooling under a compulsory system. Having conceded the principle thus far, they argued, why not apply it on a wider basis and establish a system of compulsory elementary education for all?

Germany was also much quoted as a good precedent. 'Take a return-ticket to Germany at a cost of about £20', said one member, 'and those who oppose compulsory education will come back very much altered in their opinions.' Against this contention, two arguments were advanced. One, of course, was that England politically and historically was quite unlike Germany. 'For what was compulsion? Making a man do what he disliked; something that England would never tolerate.' The other line of argument was to quote the opposite experience of the United States, where, it was alleged, compulsion had been tried and proved a failure, 'because it was not in accordance with the feelings of the people'. In spite of the fact that compulsory education was the law in most of the States, 'truantism and absenteeism were increasing every day'. A representative of the Massachusetts Board of Instruction was quoted as having written: 'No fact connected with our schools has impressed me so sadly as the extent of truancy and non-attendance, and the strange apathy of the public to this fruitful form of juvenile crime.'

There were a good many advocates of a system of compulsion for districts that wanted to operate the principle of compulsion. If it failed in any district, it was argued, that would be merely a local failure. But if a general compulsory law was passed and that failed, its failure would bring discredit on Parliament. The Bishop of Manchester was quoted as saying that a compulsory law that failed would have a most demoralizing effect upon the stability of the social structure. That, said the opponents of general compulsion, was all too likely to happen, 'For the principle is foreign to our tastes, habits, and sentiments, and will be found impracticable.'

Replying to the debate, the Government spokesman, W. E. Forster, showed sympathy with the idea of general compulsion, but said that at that stage it was not practicable. The issue was largely one of school accommodation, for there would not be enough places to accommodate all children until more schools had been built. Meanwhile it was surely best to leave it to the School Boards to consider what was best for their own districts. When this permissive legislation had had a fair trial, the question of applying compulsion on a national scale could be further considered. This view prevailed, and the Government's proposal was carried by a large majority.



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### THE TRANSFORMATION OF OPINION

It was clear from the debates in 1870 that opinion about compulsory education was moving away from the negative attitude that had prevailed so long. Several factors account for this, and one undoubtedly was the grim reality of thousands of children running wild in the streets of large towns with deplorable consequences. It has been said that law is the public conscience, and there can be no doubt that the public conscience was deeply shocked by the knowledge that was accumulating of child neglect in the populous areas.

Another factor, more difficult to assess, was the influence that some of the political thinkers of the day were exerting. No one swayed liberal opinion more powerfully at that time than John Stuart Mill, who, though nurtured on the pure milk of *laissez faire*, had been driven by the logic of events to realize more and more that a more positive social philosophy was necessary if justice was to be done. He was no believer in State education, regarding it as 'a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another', but in spite of his strong advocacy of individual liberty, he was a staunch supporter of the cause of compulsory education, holding strongly the view that parents had no right to deny their children education. 'The objections which are urged against State education', he maintained, 'do not apply to the enforcement of education by the State but to the State's taking upon itself to direct that education: which is a totally different thing.' He argued further that it was wholly wrong to leave it to the parent to decide whether his child should be educated or not; and he deplored the fact that public opinion was too timid to take the plunge of demanding the coercion of the negligent parent. 'Is it not', he wrote in his famous essay *On Liberty*, 'almost a self-evident axiom that the State should require and compel the education, up to a certain standard, of every human being who is born its citizen? Yet who is there that is not afraid to recognize and assert this truth?'

Another of the great Victorian prophets, Matthew Arnold, was also helping to convert opinion in favour of compulsory action; and he was especially listened to because besides being a poet and a man of letters, he was also an Inspector of Schools and in that capacity had visited Europe studying the practical implications of the problem. While satisfied that education would never be universal in England until it was made compulsory, he had certain doubts as to whether a compulsory system could be made to work here. He therefore sought to discover the pre-

requisites of a workable compulsory system, and as a result of his enquiries enunciated three principles: (a) the law of compulsory education should be fair and applicable to children in all grades of society; (b) the education provided should be adequate and of a kind to evoke the appreciation of parents; and (c) there should be a reasonable standard of living so that the attitude of the parents would not be dictated by economic necessity. In support of this last point he cited the experience of the Swiss canton of Vaud, where, he said, owing to economic stress in the homes, school attendance had actually decreased in spite of a compulsory law. After reflecting upon the question whether education to be compulsory ought also to be free, he came to the conclusion that it should. But he recognized that compulsion and fee-paying could co-exist, remarking that 'in Prussia, where schooling is compulsory, there is no school which does not levy a school fee, though a low one'.

Matthew Arnold's was essentially an expert contribution to a consideration of the problem, but there were other advocates, less well-informed, but no less influential in shaping public opinion. Carlyle, for example, who in his explosive way denounced the idea of leaving it to local option. 'Who would suppose,' he declared, 'that education were a thing to be advocated on the ground of local expediency, or indeed on any ground? As if it stood not on the basis of everlasting duty, as a prime necessity of man.' There were too among leading public men, some who had been converted from a dislike of compulsion into a belief that it was essential to social justice. 'Twenty-seven years as a parish clergyman' made Charles Kingsley not only a strong advocate of compulsory education, but also convinced him that to be effective it must be free. 'Many children,' he said after studying school attendance in Birmingham, 'were kept from school simply by the poverty of their parents.' He argued that if parents have to buy education, they are tempted to regard it as a luxury, something that they ought not to afford.

#### EDUCATION: COMPULSORY AND FREE

The only serious divisive force in our educational politics in the late nineteenth century was religion, and the controversies on that issue cut across the normal party alignment. On the urgent need for development in elementary education there was fairly general agreement; and thus when Gladstone's Liberal ministry, which had been responsible for the Elementary Education Act of 1870, fell, Disraeli's Conservative ministry was eager



to build upon the foundations that the Liberals had laid. Social reform was a main plank in Disraeli's political platform, and he had roused the young men of his party to a high pitch of indignation about 'the condition of England', especially the misery of the poor in the crowded towns. Education was the foundation of his social policy, for, said he, 'upon the education of the people of this country the fate of this country depends'.

His Government therefore soon resurrected the issue of compulsion, and got Parliament to agree in 1876 upon a second Elementary Education Act designed to improve school attendance and define the legal obligation of parents. In 1880 the Liberals, returned to power, followed with an Act that made the law of school attendance generally compulsory, and in 1891, with the Conservatives back in office, a further Act was passed that had the effect of abolishing fees in all but a few elementary schools. Thus before the nineteenth century closed elementary education in England had become virtually both compulsory and free. The foundations of the English law of school attendance had thus been slowly and surely laid, with both of the political parties contributing to the task.

There were three principal reasons for the gradualism which characterized this legislation about compulsion. One was the belief that, as Matthew Arnold had suggested, it would be imprudent to introduce compulsion on a general scale until it had a reasonable measure of support from public opinion. Another was a desire among those who favoured voluntary schools to give the Churches a fair opportunity of building additional schools to meet the increased demand that obligatory attendance would entail. The third was the recognition that it would be impracticable, and indeed foolish, to require parents to send their children to school until there was sufficient room for them. Policy that at first sight may seem hesitant and difficult to justify becomes intelligible if these considerations are borne in mind.

During the twenty-one years (1870-91) people generally got accustomed to the idea of compulsion, and parents became more and more ready to regard it as a requirement that would have to be accepted. Under the Act of 1870 many School Boards were established, and the best of them successfully administered bye-laws requiring children between the ages of five and thirteen to attend school. In a report made a year after the Act had been in operation, it was estimated that while there ought to be at least 3,000,000 children in school, only about 2,000,000 at the most could have been accommodated. The actual average attendance during those first years was in fact little over 1,300,000. By 1876 the available accommodation had nearly doubled,

and the voluntary agencies had provided about two-thirds of this. It was this progress in building that enabled Parliament to take the further step in 1876 of greatly strengthening the law of school attendance. One of the weaknesses of the Act of 1870 had been that School Boards could only be established when there was a shortage of school accommodation, and thus about half the country was without a local authority to operate and enforce bye-laws for school attendance. This new Act ensured that where there was not a School Board there should be a Local Attendance Committee with similar powers as regards compulsion as the School Board.

The Act of 1876 also dealt with administrative aspects of school attendance which had been left deliberately vague in 1870. The School Boards had found, when they brought negligent parents before the magistrates, that the prosecution was often ineffective because of uncertainty as to the law. The duty of the parent, where compulsory bye-laws were in operation, was now made plain, and in terms that, subject to an important modification in 1944 as to the standard of education required, have been the law ever since. It made it the duty of the parent to cause his child to receive efficient elementary instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Thus under the English law, a parent is not obliged to send his child to school, but he is under compulsion to ensure that he reaches a certain standard of education.

This Act also introduced a new device for enforcing the law which has become a permanent feature of English practice. Under the Act of 1870 it was possible only to take the parent of an absentee pupil to court and ask the magistrates to inflict a fine. The Act of 1876 authorized the School Board (or the Attendance Committee) to ask for the issue of an Attendance Order against a parent who was not ensuring that his child received efficient instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Such an Order was to state the school at which the child must attend, and the number of times at which the child should be present. The Act had a marked effect on school attendance, which rose in four years by about half a million. Parents by now were growing accustomed to the practice of sending their children to school regularly, and there had been a steady increase in the provision of school accommodation. It was these two factors that led to the next step, namely the enforcement of school attendance throughout the whole country under the Act of 1880.

There remained the further question, whether to make elementary education free. The issue had been hotly debated when the Act of 1870 was under consideration, and the Education



League, of which Joseph Chamberlain was a moving spirit, had pressed strongly for the abolition of fees. But fee-paying was traditional in the voluntary schools, the managers of which regarded the children's pence as a necessary source of income. There were some who regarded compulsion and fee-paying as incompatible, but others, especially among the supporters of voluntary schools, who saw nothing inconsistent in requiring parents to pay a small sum in order to obtain for their children the education that the law required. Eventually a compromise was agreed upon. The Elementary Education Act of 1891, though known colloquially as 'The Free Schooling Act', did not entirely abolish fees. It abolished them in the School Board schools, and encouraged the voluntary schools to abolish them by making them an extra grant by way of compensation. As a result the great majority of elementary schools became free after 1891, but a few continued to charge fees until 1918, when the Act of that year laid it down that all elementary education should be free.

#### THE AGE RANGE OF COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE: AND THE PRACTICE OF EXEMPTIONS

The age range of compulsory attendance in England today is five to fifteen; and it is interesting to note the stages by which the range has been gradually extended. The first experiences of a prescribed age range for school attendance were in connexion with the attempts made by factory legislation to humanize the employment of children. Thus the Factory Act of 1833 stipulated that all boys and girls between the ages of nine and thirteen employed in certain textile mills should attend school for two hours a day, while the Factory Act of 1844 introduced the principle of 'half-time schooling' for children between the ages of eight and thirteen. Parents as well as employers were made responsible for seeing that children attended school either on three full days a week or for three hours on six half-days in each week. This practice of half-time was continued under the Education Acts until 1918, when it was abolished to the great satisfaction of all who had the interests of education at heart.

The Factory Acts, however, affected only a limited number of children, and during the various enquiries, official and unofficial, that prepared the way for the Education Act of 1870, one of the chief complaints was that attendance was very irregular under the voluntary system and that the average school life was so short that the majority of the children did not profit from their

schooling. The cost of education was increasing, and it was often argued that in view of the short school life of so many children the money spent on their education was being wasted. At one conference on school attendance, for example, it was reported that of 2,000,000 children at school forty-two per cent attended for less than one year, and another twenty-two per cent left during their second year. It was estimated that only four per cent stayed for five years. When the Newcastle Commission reported in 1861 they took the view that because of the demands of employment children could not normally be expected to stay at school after eleven years of age, and that therefore it was important to concentrate upon the education of infants and young children.

This partly accounts for the fact that in England the teaching of infants has a comparatively long and on the whole a good tradition; and it helps to explain why in the Education Act of 1870 the School Boards were empowered to make bye-laws fixing the beginning of compulsory attendance at the age of five, the age at which it has remained ever since, in spite of occasional suggestions at times of financial stringency to raise it to six. The employment factor also helps to account for the attitude of Parliament in 1870 to the later years of school life; the School Boards were empowered to fix thirteen as the age to which a child had to continue his attendance, but it was made very easy for exemptions to be obtained from the age of ten onwards. The Education Act of 1876, however, laid down a minimum requirement below which no bye-laws should fall. It forbade the employment of any child under the age of ten, and stipulated that no child between the ages of ten and fourteen should be employed unless he had obtained a certificate from a Government inspector, certifying a certain minimum proficiency in reading, writing and arithmetic, or alternatively could show that he had made 250 attendances for each of five years. This alternative was popularly known as the dunce's certificate. Children of ten and over could however still be employed half-time regardless of these conditions if their work came under the Factory Acts.

The Elementary Education Act of 1880 marks an important step forward; it made it illegal for any child between ten and thirteen years of age to be absent from school, even half-time, without a certificate of proficiency. The alternative or dunce's certificate, based on good attendance, was made available only for children of thirteen years of age, and even so they had to attend school half-time for a further year. In 1893 the lowest age at which children could be excused from attendance at school was raised to eleven, and in 1899 it was raised to twelve,



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except in agricultural districts where under certain conditions children might become half-timers at the age of eleven. Thus by the end of the nineteenth century all children in England were normally in full-time attendance at school between the ages of five and twelve: and speaking generally were attending with reasonable regularity, the average attendance being about eighty per cent.

### THE EDUCATION ACT OF 1902

Up to the end of the nineteenth century, it had been assumed that State intervention in education should be restricted to providing the children of the working class with a minimum of instruction, enough to secure literacy. As H. G. Wells puts it: 'The Education Act of 1870 was not an act for common universal education, it was an act to educate the lower classes for employment on lower class lines . . .'. Towards the close of the century, however, there were misgivings about this policy; and in 1889 Parliament passed two measures, which mark the beginning of State action in higher education, namely the Technical Instruction Act, and the Welsh Intermediate Education Act which provided Wales with a chain of secondary schools. Some of the leading School Boards also tried to provide a better education for the abler pupils in the elementary schools, straining their powers under the Elementary Education Acts to set up higher grade schools. But these were declared illegal on the ground that the education provided was not 'elementary'. This decision, which was hotly contested, intensified the demand for new legislation; and the result of this wide-spread demand for reform was the Education Act of 1902. This great statute, for which the Conservative Ministry of Arthur Balfour was responsible, constitutes with the Acts of 1870 and 1944 the foundation of the English Law of Education.

The Education Act of 1902 had two main features: (a) it abolished the School Board, and made the new County and County Borough Councils the local authorities for higher as well as elementary education, and (b) it maintained the Dual System, much as the Act of 1870 had shaped it, but it helped the voluntary schools to meet the burden of rising costs by subsidizing them not only from taxes but also from the local rates. They no longer had to bear any cost of maintenance except for the upkeep of the school structure. The most notable development under this Act, however, was the provision by the County and County Borough Councils of new secondary schools; and it was upon this

aspect of policy that the central Government concentrated its attention. Before this Act, apart from private schools, the only secondary education available was that given in the ancient endowed grammar schools, into which not more than about four or five of every thousand children leaving the elementary schools gained admission. It has been calculated that in 1894 the odds against a child in an elementary school gaining a scholarship to a secondary school was 270 to one, and forty years later the odds had as a result of the developments under the Act of 1902 improved to eleven to one. When that Act came into operation, the number of secondary schools accepted as eligible for State aid was less than 300; this figure had increased by the outbreak of the second world war to about 1400. Nor does this comparison quite do justice to the achievement, for many of the older schools were greatly enlarged and most of the new schools were much larger than most of the older grammar schools. The sharp distinction between elementary and secondary education, however, continued; and the practice both centrally and locally was to administer them as separate services. The pupils at a secondary school were, of course, as much subject to the law of compulsory attendance as those at the elementary school; but it was with the latter that the administration of school attendance was normally associated. In the forty-two years between the Act of 1902 and 1944 the elementary school underwent many changes: its curriculum became much wider in scope, and as the size of classes declined, the discipline became more humane and there was less and less regimentation. This change was reflected in the administration of school attendance, which beginning as a campaign against truancy gradually developed into a service as much concerned with child welfare as with irregular attendance. /



## EARLY ADMINISTRATION OF THE LAW OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

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Between 1870 and 1902 the elementary schools of England, in spite of their many shortcomings and their restricted curriculum, accomplished nothing less than a social revolution. One of the major difficulties at the outset was that of getting children to school: for many parents were hostile and defiant, and many magistrates were averse to imposing fines. Even when they did, many parents paid them and continued to disobey the law; 'one might', says one of the best of our educational historians, 'still read of parents convicted for the twentieth, thirtieth, fortieth, and even the sixty-first time, and of admission being sought by large numbers of children between six and ten who had never attended school before.' The attendance officers, appointed by the School Boards to enforce the law, often had a most unenviable task: and in their old age they still spoke with something like terror of the hostility that they encountered in those early years, especially those whose duty took them into the less desirable quarters of a big city. The memory of these early days of enforcement still lingers. Occasionally one comes across lawless parents of truant children who speak with contempt of the school attendance officer as 'the School Board man', and this in spite of the fact that the School Boards were abolished nearly half a century ago. The rural areas had their special difficulties, and there the farmer members of the School Boards often sided with the offending parents, because they were chagrined at being deprived of the children's labour on their farms. Epidemics, too, wrought havoc with attendance; for the public health service was still in its infancy, and the gathering together of the children in schools tended to increase the incidence of measles, whooping cough and other childhood maladies.

But gradually the tide turned; parents became more and more accustomed to the necessity of sending their children to school. The School Board and the School Attendance Committees developed a routine, and week by week, they pored over the attendance returns submitted by their officers, noting improvement and stimulating efforts to raise the average attendance in districts where it was weak. Various devices were introduced to encourage

good attendance, usually designed to stimulate competition among the pupils or rivalry between the schools in an area. Thus school banners were instituted, assigned weekly to the form with the best attendance, or medals and prizes for all pupils who attained a prescribed high level of attendance throughout the year. Philanthropic members of School Boards presented cups and shields to be held for one year by the school in their area that secured the best attendance. Thus by one method or another attendance was gradually improved to an average of eighty per cent or more; and when figures were collated centrally, there grew up a certain rivalry between the different authorities, and the over-all percentage helped to set a standard.

#### THE ADMINISTRATION OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The County and County Borough Councils, as the local education authorities set up under the Act of 1902, were required to appoint Education Committees, who in turn set up sub-committees for various aspects of education. There was also a curious compromise in the Act of 1902, namely that for some areas, mainly urban areas with a population of about 20,000, a separate authority for elementary education was established; this was done to meet objections to the abolition of the School Boards, and it created a rather awkward anomaly of a number of authorities concerned only with elementary education.

It was usual—although there was no hard and fast rule—for the various Education Committees to set up as one of the sub-committees a School Attendance Committee, the chief duties of which were:

- (1) To nominate members of local committees, and determine their districts.
- (2) To appoint, subject to confirmation by the Education Committee, school attendance officers for the various districts.
- (3) To decide, after hearing the opinion of the local committee, as to any children to be sent to an industrial school.
- (4) To decide, after hearing the opinion of the local committee, on all cases for prosecution for illegal employment of children.

Thus the normal staff, in the earlier years of the century, was a chief school attendance officer and a local attendance officer for each district, all of them being members of the staff of the Director of Education. It was usual for the district sub-committees to meet at least once a month, and the principal business always was that of interviewing the parents of children who were either



## COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

absentees or irregular in their attendance. It was not until 1944 that the practice of having local bye-laws was abolished, and therefore the questions which the local attendance committee had to consider were usually related to the bye-laws.

The content of the bye-laws was normally as follows:

- (1) The parent of every child not less than five, nor more than fourteen, years of age, shall cause such child to attend school unless there be a reasonable excuse.
- (2) Any of the following shall be deemed a reasonable excuse:
  - (a) That the child is under efficient instruction in some other manner.
  - (b) That the child has been prevented from attending school by sickness or any unavoidable cause.
  - (c) That there is no public elementary school open which the child can attend within two miles, measured according to the nearest road from the residence of each child.
- (3) The time during which every child shall attend school shall be the whole time for which the school selected shall be open for the instruction of children of similar age, provided that where the parent has notified to the managers in writing his intention to withdraw his child from instruction in religious subjects, and that the object of such withdrawal is to receive religious instruction elsewhere, then such time shall be the whole time for which the school selected shall be open for secular instruction only.

But to these rules, there were always certain provisos, as for example:

- (1) Nothing in the bye-laws
  - (a) shall prevent the withdrawal of any child from any religious observance or instruction in religious subjects;
  - (b) shall require any child to attend school on any day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which his parent belongs;
  - (c) shall have any force or effect in so far as it may be contrary to anything contained in any Act for regulating the employment of children employed in labour.
- (2) A child between twelve and fourteen years of age shall not be required to attend school if such child has received a certificate from one of His Majesty's Inspectors of Schools that it has reached the Sixth Standard prescribed by the Code for the time being. (And sometimes girls between twelve and fourteen were exempted at the Fifth Standard if they had obtained a certificate of competency in cookery, laundry, household sewing or dairy work.)

- (3) A child between thirteen and fourteen shall not be required to attend school if he is shown to the satisfaction of the local education authority to be beneficially employed and has made 350 attendances after five years of age during each year for five years, whether consecutive or not.

It will be appreciated that in administering bye-laws of this nature, the local attendance committees had no easy task; and they were so often confronted with parents of an irresponsible type that it is not surprising that they were inclined to look upon the various 'reasons' and 'excuses' with some degree of suspicion. They sometimes felt that medical certificates were more easily obtained from some doctors than from others, and the whole question of what constituted beneficial employment was a source of difficulty. They had to consider, for example, whether it endangered the moral or physical welfare of the child, whether it was likely to increase the child's knowledge of an occupation, whether that occupation would lead to permanent employment, and whether it was carried out under decent conditions. The question of whether a child was receiving efficient education elsewhere did not often arise. If it did, it was either a question of deciding whether some rather indifferent private school was giving the minimum teaching required or whether the home tuition provided for a child was satisfactory. Where such doubts arose, the local education authority made arrangements for the examination of the child by properly qualified persons. A common excuse was the illness of the mother, making the help of the daughter in the house a necessity; and local attendance committees were strongly urged to discountenance this plea except 'in very special cases'. As for exemption certificates, the great majority of those issued were for boys and girls between thirteen and fourteen entering 'beneficial employment'. But the main result of the work of the local school attendance committees and of the school attendance officers was a steady improvement in the regularity of attendance, and a decline in the number of exemptions. Half-time however still continued until its abolition in 1918; but in that also there was a gradual decrease. In 1876 there had been over 200,000 half-timers and by 1914 the figure had dropped to about 70,000. The work of the attendance committees was greatly simplified when the Education Act of 1918 required all children without exception to continue at school until the end of the term following the fourteenth birthday. This Act, however, also permitted local authorities to adopt bye-laws raising the age to fifteen years, and it is interesting to note that only fifteen of the 315 authorities took advantage of this provision. For there was a growing belief that the age of



compulsory attendance was a national issue, and not one for local variation. It was also made permissible to raise the lower compulsory age to six by bye-law, but this also had little effect, only one authority deciding to introduce such a bye-law.

It will be appreciated that the more complex the law of school attendance is, so much the more irksome becomes the business of registration within the school. The Elementary School Codes of 1910 declared: 'The keeping and checking of school register is of vital importance'. Head teachers were obliged to devote much time and care to this tedious duty, and to observe numerous rules of a most detailed character. They had, for example, to keep a special register for partial exemptions; and one of the rules to be observed in compiling this will illustrate the nature of the requirements that head teachers were called upon to observe:

At the end of the year a list must be drawn up and signed on behalf of the local education authority, certifying (a) the number of two-hour attendances made by each partial exemption scholar; (b) the addition claimed on his behalf. This addition may not exceed:

- (1) one-half of the two-hour attendances made by the scholar during the year or that portion of the year during which he has been a partial exemption scholar; nor
- (2) such a number as, when added to the number of his two-hour attendances during the year or that portion of the year during which he has been a partial exemption scholar, will give a total equal to the number of meetings of the school during the same period.

No one who can recall the amount of time which head teachers had to give to registration at this period would ever wish to advocate a law of school attendance that was not simple and comparatively easy to administer. For it was not only a question of wasteful use of the teachers' time, but also it was a distasteful duty for anyone who was not by nature inclined to the keeping of precise and elaborate records. The information was necessary not only for the due enforcement of attendance, but also served as a basis for the Board of Education's annual grant. The checking of the registers therefore assumed the solemnity of an audit; they were examined closely not only by the school managers, but also by the officials of the local education authority and finally by the officials of the Board of Education.

How seriously the question of the verification of registers was viewed by the Board of Education may be gauged from the instruction to school managers:

The managers are held responsible for the supervision and

effective verification of the registration, and at the end of the school year are required to certify:

- (1) that the registers have been accurately kept in accordance with the rules of this schedule; and
- (2) that the accuracy of the registers has been tested by the managers on several occasions and the result recorded in the log book.

In order to be able to give this certificate and properly to check the registration, managers are expected to visit the school without notice at least once in a quarter, at some time during the period of secular instruction, in order that an attendance may be counted for grant, so that they may see that the registers have been properly marked and closed in accordance with the requirements of the Code of this Schedule.

The tendency to attach such great importance to registration was unfortunate in many ways. It gave registration a prominence in elementary education which was not helpful to the status of the teacher, and managers often regarded the checking of the registers as their main function in the service of education, some even reckoning careful registration as the hall-mark of a good head teacher. The habit of attaching an exaggerated importance to registration lingers, and it is difficult to deny that registers still sometimes absorb time that could be much better spent. On the other hand, this early obsession with the statistics of registration undoubtedly had a wholesome influence upon school attendance. Careful statements of attendance at each school were compiled week by week; they in turn were collated by the local attendance officer and scrutinized closely by the local attendance committee; and then the district compilations were analysed and brought together into a monthly return for the whole of the local authority's area and circulated to the Education Committee. When such care was exercised, it was not easy for a truant to escape attention, or for a school with a low average attendance not to come under the fire of criticism.

Head teachers often resented the time-wasting nature of the burden imposed on them, but this did not prevent them from co-operating with the utmost goodwill in the task of improving attendance. Indeed, the clue to good attendance, as a rule, was a happy relationship between the head teacher and the school attendance officer; for when that existed, the latter could often exert a preventive influence, dealing with the early symptoms of irregular attendance and getting to the cause of it before it had a chance of developing into persistent truancy. Thus there came about a gradual evolution in the functions of the school attendance officer. Beginning in School Board days as a kind



of policeman, enforcing the law and combating the resistance of defiant parents, he had, early in the twentieth century, established his position as a useful liaison between the school and the unco-operative home. Gradually the school attendance officer has out-grown completely the hostility he encountered as 'the School Board man', and although he still has to prosecute, the number of obstinate and irresponsible parents is now relatively small; the experience of attendance committees has shown that the absences due to parental failure are not more than about ten per cent. There are however other causes of absence, social and domestic, which call for sympathy and help and not for severity. Further, it has become more and more appreciated that in the social background of education, there is good work to be done if children are to profit by their schooling; and there has been a tendency to assign more and more of these humane services to the school attendance department, with the result that today the school attendance officer functions largely as a welfare officer, and is often described by that title.

## MODERN DEVELOPMENTS

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### THE EDUCATION ACT OF 1944

One of the great reforms of the Education Act of 1944 was the abolition of the *élémentary school*, thus bringing to an end the obsolete conception of a system of education based on the principle of 'two nations', the privileged and the unprivileged. Instead it requires that education shall be organized in three continuous stages: primary, secondary and further. All education in England and Wales is therefore now organized in that way, except in schools outside the national system. The law affecting the latter, that is the private or independent schools, was however much strengthened; and there is now provision for the maintenance of a register of all such schools, and the Minister is empowered to deal with private schools where the premises are unsuitable, the accommodation inadequate, the instruction inefficient, or the proprietor not a fit person to have the charge of children. Thus a problem that had often worried school attendance committees has been legally dealt with: frequently in the past they had been conscious of the fact that there were children attending unsatisfactory private schools who by doing so barely satisfied the minimum educational requirement. It is important to add that among the private or independent schools are many of high quality, especially some of those attended by the children of parents able to pay high tuition or boarding fees. Among these are the schools known as 'the public schools'; it is one of the peculiarities of English scholastic nomenclature that the best independent or private schools, like Eton or Harrow or Winchester, are called 'public schools'.

Another aspect of the Education Act which has a bearing on the question of compulsory school attendance is its religious settlement; and on this occasion religion, the cause of so much bitterness in the past, provoked very little criticism. There were several reasons for this. One was that the Act was the handiwork of a coalition Government; and with the second world war still raging, there was a strong disinclination to engage in domestic controversy. But the quiet acceptance of the religious clauses



was also partly the result of the care taken to consult fully and well in advance all the interests concerned. By patient discussion of the issues involved with representatives of the churches, the local authorities, teachers and others, a concordat was arrived at which gave general satisfaction. It was based on the assumption that there was a general desire that religious education should be given a more defined place in the life and work of the schools; and on this foundation the 1870 compromise was modified and expanded.

The Act requires every State-aided primary and secondary school to begin the day with collective worship by all pupils, and also that religious instruction shall be given in every school. All this is subject to the conscience clause of 1870, and to another clause which seeks to ensure that no teacher shall suffer because of his religious convictions. The 1870 requirement that religious teaching must be given only at the beginning and end of a session was rescinded; and thus a class can now receive its religious lesson at any time of the day. One advantage of this decision has been that the religious teaching can now be given by one or more of the teachers on the staff specially interested in the subject; formerly, when every class had its religious lesson at the same time, almost every teacher had to give the religious lesson, regardless of his or her inclination or suitability. But the most important aspect of the concordat is that it retains the dual system; and this system, which from 1870 had been applicable only to elementary schools, is extended to cover the whole range of primary and secondary education.

The Education Act of 1944 continues the lower age of compulsory attendance at five years of age, but it also requires local education authorities 'to have regard to the need for securing that provision is made for pupils who have not attained the age of five years' by the establishment of nursery schools or classes. The upper age of compulsory attendance was raised to fifteen; and at the same time an Education Act passed in 1936 was repealed. This ill-fated measure had decided that the age should be raised to fifteen as from 1 September 1939, but had done so in a rather half-hearted way, stipulating that there should be arrangements for the issue of employment certificates to enable certain pupils to leave after their fourteenth birthday. However nothing came of this because of the outbreak of the second world war; and the authors of the Education Act of 1944, discarding the idea of exemptions, decided wholeheartedly on fifteen as the upper age of compulsory attendance without any exemptions. The compulsory age range in England today is, therefore, five to fifteen; but the Education Act also provides for the raising of

the school leaving age to sixteen by Order in Council when the Minister deems it practicable.

The Act of 1944 is much the most comprehensive measure of educational legislation adopted by an English Parliament; it deals with all aspects of education from infancy to the adult stage, excepting university education. It has 122 clauses and nine schedules; it will be appreciated therefore that it would be impossible here to summarize it and also inappropriate. It is hoped, however, that the foregoing paragraphs will give a fair indication of its general effect on problems of compulsory education. We shall now examine more closely the provisions that affect school attendance.

#### THE EFFECT OF THE EDUCATION ACT OF 1944 ON PROBLEMS OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The abolition of the elementary school naturally has many consequences for the school attendance service. For, as we have seen, the latter originated as a result of the Act of 1870 to enforce the attendance of children at elementary schools: and although the duties of the school attendance officer have greatly expanded through the years, the attendance at the elementary school has always been an essential task. It is now necessary to think of school attendance in terms, not of the elementary school, but of the primary and secondary stages. Moreover the Act of 1944 entirely dispenses with bye-laws, and the whole law of school attendance is enacted nationally by statute. But much more important is a change in what is required of the parent. Under the former law, the parent had been under an obligation 'to cause his child to receive efficient elementary instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic,' but under the Act of 1944 this obligation is replaced by another which instead requires him to cause his child 'to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise'. Thus literacy ceases to be acceptable as a minimum standard, and the State demands that everyone of its citizens shall receive an education appropriate to his or her talents.

This emphasis on aptitude and ability becomes of decisive importance when the child is ready for the secondary stage, that is between the age of eleven and twelve. The Act, true to our tradition of respecting the wishes of the parent, gives him the right to select the school that his child shall attend; but the local authority has also an important voice in the selection, founding its opinion on records and tests carried out during the primary stage



or on an examination of the child's aptitudes and abilities at the age of eleven. If there is a clash of opinion between the parent and the local authority, the Education Act of 1944 resolves it by making the Minister the final arbiter. The words of the Act on this point are worth quoting: 'If the local education authority are of opinion that the school selected by the parent, as the school to be named in a school attendance order, is unsuitable to the age, ability or aptitude of the child with respect to whom the order is made, or that the attendance of the child at the school so selected would involve unreasonable expense to the authority, the authority may, after giving notice to the parent of their intention to do so, apply to the Minister for a direction determining what school is to be named in the order.'

The Act requires that all children of compulsory school age attending any school must be registered, and makes it the parent's duty 'to cause them to attend regularly.' A pupil, once registered, can only be withdrawn from his school under an approved procedure; and the register has to be kept correctly. Anyone responsible for registration failing to comply with the requirements of the law makes himself liable to a fine not exceeding ten pounds. The procedure for dealing with a parent who fails to see that his child receives a suitable education is laid down in the Act most precisely; and local authorities no longer have to go to the magistrates for a school attendance order requiring a parent to send his child to school regularly. They can issue such an order themselves, and then if the parent fails to comply, prosecute him for non-compliance with the order. The penalties which magistrates can inflict are much more severe than they used to be. Before 1944 the maximum penalty for a breach of the bye-laws was twenty shillings, and this sum had to include costs. Now for a first offence by a parent, the penalty is a fine not exceeding one pound; for a second offence a fine not exceeding five pounds, and for a third or subsequent offence a fine not exceeding ten pounds or imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month or both. The grounds upon which a parent can justify his non-compliance with a school attendance order are clearly defined, and are briefly as follows: (a) that the child was prevented from attending by sickness or other unavoidable cause; (b) that any day of absence was one 'exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which his parent belongs'; (c) that the school at which the child is registered is not within walking distance of the child's home, and no suitable arrangements for transport have been made by the local authority. 'Walking distance' has since been defined as two miles for a child of less than eight years and three miles for any other child; and a local

education authority is expected to provide free transport for distances beyond this limit or, in certain circumstances, to provide boarding accommodation near the school. If however the distance is due to the parent's preference for a particular school, it is recognized that the authority cannot be expected to provide transport, but it may in such circumstances pay reasonable travelling expenses.

In the past parents who were poor or thriftless often advanced as an explanation of the irregular attendance of their children their lack of clothing or footwear. School attendance committees hesitated to apply for a school attendance order in such cases: and in the large towns especially it was customary to organize on a voluntary basis some fund out of which clothing and footwear could be provided in necessitous cases. When children were evacuated during the second world war, there were many heart-rending instances of neglected children ill-clad and ill-shod; and for them clothes and boots were provided either out of Government funds or by voluntary effort. Such children greatly benefited as a result and were much better able to profit by their education; it is not easy for a child to do his best if he has to come to school on a wet day wearing shoes that leak or without an overcoat. In Scotland the law enabled local education authorities to provide boots and clothing, and conscious of these examples, Parliament readily agreed to a clause in the Education Act which gave local authorities in England and Wales similar powers in respect of any registered pupil. Thus a problem that had long troubled local school attendance committees, and stirred their sympathies, has been happily solved. Another factor which has greatly facilitated school attendance has been the provision at school of milk for all children in the middle of the morning, and a good midday meal. For the meal parents pay according to their means, the children of necessitous parents receiving their meal free. It is usual to observe a similar income scale when supplying clothing and footwear; and it should be remembered that poverty is by no means the sole cause of parental neglect to clothe children. It can now be said with some degree of certainty that irregular attendance in England should never be due to lack of nourishment or inadequate clothing.

#### FREE SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ALL

By the abolition of the elementary school and the provision of a secondary stage for all pupils, the Education Act accomplished 'secondary education for all', which had been the dream of many



educational reformers. This involved compulsory secondary education, and so raised the old issue that had been so long argued about elementary education in the nineteenth century. Now that secondary education was to be compulsory, should it also be free? It will be remembered that it was not until 1891—twenty-one years after the great Elementary Education Act of 1870—that Parliament decided that as elementary education was compulsory, it must also be free; and even then, it permitted certain exceptions that were not terminated until 1918.

In secondary schools already existing in 1944—that is to say, the grammar schools—there had been a long tradition, going back to the Middle Ages, of fee-paying with the reservation of certain free places for poor scholars. The position just prior to 1944 was that in the grammar schools, maintained or aided out of State funds, 42,558 pupils paid full fees, 9,555 paid partial fees, and 46,707 paid no fees. Among the 1,400 secondary schools attended by these pupils was a little group of semi-independent schools—232 in all—which received grants direct from the central Government and through the local authority. The supporters of these schools were particularly averse to the abolition of fees; and a departmental committee which had considered the whole question of the abolition of fees in secondary schools had divided on the issue, eleven members favouring abolition and a minority of seven opposing it.

The decision embodied in the Act represents a compromise. It accepts the principle followed in the Act of 1891 that compulsory education involves free education; and it applies it to all secondary schools maintained by the State, whether county (that is, local authority) or voluntary schools, but it permits fees still to be charged in the small group of direct grant schools, though in their case the fee charged is subject to the approval of the Minister and is graduated in proportion to the parent's income. But with this small exception, and of course that of the private and wholly independent schools, secondary education in England is entirely free.

It would be inappropriate here to consider at any length the organization of secondary schools, but it is desirable to note that the Act applies to the curriculum the same requirement as that which the parent has to fulfil—namely it must provide an education appropriate to the age, aptitude and ability of the pupil. At present much consideration is being given as to how best to organize secondary education for this purpose, the Ministry encouraging a variety of approaches to the problem. Thus in some areas three types of secondary schools are being provided—grammar, technical, and modern—and in others the

two or the three aspects of secondary education are combined in one school. What the future pattern of secondary school organization in England will be it is difficult to forecast. This, at least, is certain, that the problem of compulsory school attendance has undergone a fundamental change; it began as the straightforward though difficult task of getting children to school, and it has become the more intricate problem of getting them to schools appropriate to their age, aptitude and ability.

#### TWO EPISODES THAT RECALL THE PAST, AND ILLUSTRATE THE CHANGE OF OUTLOOK

It is difficult for us now to understand the nature of the problems that the pioneers in school attendance had to deal with in the eighteen-seventies. But there have been two episodes in recent years which recalled those early struggles, and helped one to realize what the old School Boards were up against when confronted with the task of getting children to school. The first of these episodes was an unexpected consequence of the evacuation of children at the beginning of the last war. The evacuation from the large cities and towns was carried out smoothly and expeditiously at the beginning of September 1939, but when the children had gone the bombs did not fall, and the parents brought them back to their urban homes in their thousands. But the schools were closed and some indeed were in use for other urgent purposes; and it was deemed unwise to reopen them until they had been provided with air-raid shelters. Moreover there was no great desire on the part of the Government to encourage the children to stay in their old homes; the bombs might fall any day, and it was most desirable that the children should go back to their billets in the country. The children, however, remained: and until the schools could be reopened, they were free to roam the streets and run wild. How they deteriorated during that period! How rapid was the decline in behaviour and physique! That episode revealed, as no historian could, why the social reformers of the last century fought so hard for universal and compulsory education; and it brought home to many people in this country, not normally interested in education, the social significance of the school as the foundation of a decent community life. The demand for a speedy resumption of compulsory education was impressive in its unanimity.

The other episode came shortly after the end of the war. The coalition war-time Government had been replaced by a Labour Ministry, and one of the issues it had to decide, when



confronted with post-war scarcity of man-power and materials, was whether to implement the clause in the Education Act raising the school leaving age to fifteen or, alternatively, whether to seek the consent of Parliament to its postponement until economic conditions improved. It was a difficult decision. The argument for postponement was strong: the classrooms were not available, the teachers were not available, and industry working at high pressure to produce goods for export could ill afford to lose a juvenile labour force of about 400,000 young people. The Government, however, preferred courage to caution; they took the view that, great though the difficulties were, they must somehow be overcome; the reform was a vital one, and it would be wrong to delay putting it into operation. It would be fatal, it was felt, to wait for a more opportune time; for the opportune time had a habit of never arriving. This brave decision created a formidable administrative problem; and once again there was a situation that recalled the anxieties of the eighteen-seventies. The problem of those earlier times had been one of finding the accommodation that a compulsory system would necessitate; and it will be remembered that the legislators of those days exercised considerable caution, postponing the decision to apply compulsion on a nation-wide scale until the schools had been built. Here, however, the decision was bravely taken to raise the age to fifteen in 1947; and vigorous emergency action was taken, in spite of a most difficult economic situation, to find both the class-rooms and the teachers.

Expressed in its simplest form the task was one of finding class-rooms and teachers for nearly 400,000 additional children. It was rendered more difficult by shortages already existing. The ravages of war had left their mark; war-time necessities had sadly reduced the flow of recruits into the teaching profession, and left the schools both short of equipment and often in a bad state of repair. About 150,000 school places had been destroyed by bombing. At the end of the war there were 26,000 teachers serving with the Forces, many of whom did not return to teaching; 20,000 had been lost owing to the partial suspension of entry into the profession; and many teachers had stayed on in their posts during the war and were over-due for superannuation. There was the further fact of the increased birthrate, which it was expected would bring about as many additional children into the schools as would the extra school year. Nor should it be forgotten that the strain of war-time duties had told upon the teaching profession; many had endured air-raids, many of them had been in charge of children during evacuation, most of them had volunteered for additional duty in the Home Guard, the

various Women's Services or as Air Raid Wardens, and all the time, with teachers absent in the Forces, classes had been exceptionally large. Even before the war, out of 145,281 classes in elementary schools, 98,779 had over thirty children in them; and yet the Ministry's regulations require that the maximum number in a class in a secondary school shall be thirty, and in a primary school forty. On all these counts, therefore, the raising of the school leaving age could be expected to present difficulties, over and above the crucial question of finding accommodation and teachers for the extra 400,000.

When, however, the Government decided that the school leaving age should be raised to fifteen, it was not of the difficulties that people spoke but of the opportunity, and how to make the most of this much desired reform. The whole attitude was very different from that which prevailed in the eighteen-seventies; and it is worth noting that while England's wealth was at its peak in 1870, in 1944 the country was staggering under the full weight of the burden of two world wars. For a complete diagnosis of the different outlook many factors would have to be taken into account; but there can be little doubt that it is largely due to the steady growth of a public appreciation of the value of education. Gradually through the years, ever since compulsory education was initiated, a silent revolution has been taking place; hostility has been vanquished, apathy and indifference, once so characteristic, have become exceptional, and in their place has grown a general recognition that education is one of life's necessities, and in a great many homes there is something much more positive—an ardent desire that the children should have the best that schools can offer. Certainly there was no background of opposition to hinder the drive to meet the requirements of the additional pupils, but on the contrary a sense of anticipation which grew into one of satisfaction as the new classrooms were to be seen here, there, and everywhere in process of erection.

In fairness to the pioneers of the eighteen-seventies, it must be admitted that, in spite of the grave shortage of man-power and materials, the post-war Labour Government had certain advantages that the Victorians never had. Otherwise this bold enterprise would never have been accomplished. War, it has often been said, teaches in its stern way some valuable lessons; and one of these is the art of planning and combining to deal with an emergency. The Ministry of Education applied this art to the task of providing teachers and class-rooms for the additional year; and conscious of the fact that they were doing so, they christened the enterprise Operation Horsa. Speaking generally,



the class-rooms were supplied and erected by the central Government; they were of more or less uniform design, mass-produced, and capable of speedy erection. They included not only class-rooms for ordinary teaching purposes, but also practical rooms for handicraft, domestic teaching, and sometimes for science and for art. The supply of teachers was accelerated by the establishment of Emergency Training Colleges throughout the country, housed in existing premises—country mansions no longer required by their owners or vacated camps. This emergency training scheme was initiated mainly to train ex-servicemen desiring to become teachers upon their release from the Forces; but advantage was taken of this scheme to supplement the teaching service, so that there would be sufficient teachers available for the additional pupils. Although the emergency training scheme, like the class-room provision, was centrally organized, neither could have been carried out without the co-operation of the local education authorities. Here again the Government had a great advantage over their Victorian predecessors; for the local authorities, with their long experience of educational administration, were able to report at once where the additional class-rooms were needed and how best they could be sited. Further they were able not only to find the mansions and camps for the Emergency Training Colleges, but were also in a position to administer them. A third advantage, which the nineteenth century reformers lacked, was a well organized teaching profession. Ever since the passing of the Act of 1944, and indeed in anticipation of it, much time and thought had been given by teachers in advance as to the best use of the additional year; as a result in a great many schools a four-year course had been carefully thought out for the older pupils, and efforts made to ensure that the pupils would find the extra year worth while. Consequently, in spite of the many difficulties, this last raising of the school leaving age has proved a pronounced success, and parents generally have appreciated the better education that their children are receiving. Coming as it did during a period of full employment, the loss of the children's earnings was not acutely felt in the homes; and with better wages, parents were as a rule glad to see their children have this new opportunity.

### COUNTY COLLEGES

It has for long been recognized that when full-time compulsory attendance ends there ought to be some arrangement for continued part-time education. The Education Act of 1918 made provision

for a system of day continuation schools, and at the end of the first world war this was regarded as a reform that would not only help our young people through the difficult period of adolescence but would also prove of value to industry. Part-time attendance at these schools was to be compulsory; and it was realized that the schools, both as regards teachers and buildings, must therefore be of such quality that the youths attending them 'would feel that it was a worth-while experience. It was seen that it would be possible to establish such schools more speedily in some areas than in others; and the Act provided that 'the appointed day' for the introduction of compulsory attendance should be fixed either area by area or on a national basis. Some local authorities pushed on rapidly with preparations, and a few day continuation schools were established; but alas! this beneficent legislation was suddenly brought to naught by a policy of post-war retrenchment, and between the wars the absence of satisfactory educational provision for the new entrants into industry was a grievous weakness. Local authorities and enlightened firms tried to fill the gap in various ways, but nothing could adequately take the place of a well-organized system of compulsory continuation schools.

The Education Act of 1944 therefore revived this proposal in the form of county colleges, which were to provide physical, practical and vocational training enabling young people to develop their various aptitudes and capacities and prepare them for the responsibilities of citizenship. Local authorities were to be asked as soon as possible to prepare plans for the colleges, including boarding accommodation for students who could not attend daily. About three years later, the authorities were to be asked to establish the colleges, and as soon as practicable afterwards compulsory attendance on a universal basis would be required. The intention was that all between the ages of fifteen and eighteen should attend either for one day or two half days a week, or continuously for a period of eight weeks or for two periods of four weeks. All would be required to attend, except those in full-time attendance at school or receiving part-time education adequately elsewhere, e.g., at a technical school. In order to facilitate the administrative arrangements for maintaining regular attendance, young persons would be required to keep the local authority informed of their address, and employers required to notify new employees and to report when they ceased to be employed. Penalties would be imposed for non-attendance, and it is interesting to note that they would fall on the young person and the employer, and not on the parent.

Unfortunately the county college has come up against the same obstacle as did the day continuation school in the nineteen-



twenties; post-war economic conditions have again prevented the introduction of compulsory part-time education. There has however been a great development of voluntary part-time attendance at technical colleges and continuation schools: for employers, recognizing more and more the value both from a moral and a vocational standpoint of this kind of education, have been increasingly ready to release youths for part-time education on a voluntary basis. There is good reason to hope, therefore, that when economic conditions improve a compulsory system of continued education will be introduced.

### THE PARENT

Fifty years ago a witty bishop, criticizing State education, said that the only part assigned to the parent in our national system of education was 'to be available for prosecution if called upon'. The unkindest of our critics today could not indulge in sarcasm of that kind. For there is a strong emphasis upon the need for the closest co-operation between home and school; and the majority of schools have a parents' association. The pains and penalties of the law have therefore lost much of their former significance; and because they now relate only to the obstinate few, it has become possible to extend the scope of compulsion and to increase the penalties for refusing to observe the law.

The essence of the law of school attendance today is that every parent must see that his child receives efficient full-time education suitable to his age, aptitude and ability; and he must ensure this by arranging for his child either to attend school regularly from the age of five up to the age of fifteen or in some approved manner. When the Minister deems the time opportune, the upper age-limit will become sixteen; and all the full-time primary and secondary education in schools maintained by public money is free. Moreover the parent is required to allow his child, when in school, to be medically inspected; and if a local authority has reason to think that a child of pre-school age is suffering from some disability, the parent is under an obligation to submit the child for examination by a medical officer if that child has reached the age of two. This is a valuable provision because it ensures early ascertainment of physical or mental defect, and enables the child to have the benefit of suitable treatment at a time when prevention or alleviation is more likely to succeed than at a later age. The law requires the attendance of children in need of special educational treatment at special schools appropriate to their particular disability, the compulsory age-range being five to sixteen.



There are other compulsory requirements, and numerous penalties are prescribed. But the parent has rights that are equally safeguarded by law. He has, for example, a right of appeal to the Minister, who is the sole arbiter as to whether or not a requirement imposed by the local authority is unreasonable. The parent also has the right to ask that his child shall receive a boarding school education; and if the local authority considers the request reasonable, arrangements are made accordingly. Further, the parents' wishes as to day or boarding school have to be respected so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure. Conscience is scrupulously respected as regards religious observance and teaching, as it has been ever since 1870; and the only notable change in this respect in the Act of 1944 is the removal of the old time-table clause which restricted religious teaching to the opening and end of a session. The former animosities about religious teaching have died down, and there is a growing tolerance. Nor can this tolerance be attributed to indifference: for there has been a ready acceptance of the new requirement in the Act of 1944 that in all primary and secondary schools the school day shall begin with a corporate act of worship, and in every such school religious teaching shall be given. Moreover, there is a general desire to meet the wishes of the parent, whenever practicable; and if a parent feels that his wishes as to the selection of a school have been unreasonably disregarded, he can write to the Minister, and our parliamentary system ensures that his submission will be carefully and sympathetically considered. It is usual to regard the father as the parent responsible under the law, but that is not always possible; so the law defines the term 'parent' as including a guardian and every person who has the actual custody of the child or young person. And for one problem, namely that of deciding whether a boarding school education is desirable, the Act requires the local education authority to consult both the father and the mother of the child.

#### THE ADMINISTRATION OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE TODAY

It is usual for a local education authority to employ a school welfare superintendent; satisfactory administration would hardly be practicable without such an officer. He acts as leader of the team of local welfare officers, as they are now frequently styled, and deals with the knotty questions of policy that arise day by day. To him also falls the lot of undertaking the more difficult interviews, and of appearing at the Magistrate's Court when cases



of special difficulty are due to be heard. He must be a person experienced in the practice of school attendance and familiar with its law and procedure; and it is an advantage if he has pursued a course of social study at the university. But there are two qualities which he must possess above all others, namely a love of children and wide human sympathy.

It is also normal practice to divide the local authority's area into districts, allocating one or more local welfare officers to each. It is essential that they should know their districts thoroughly, not only the houses and streets but still more the people and children who live there. And once he is known and liked, he can secure results that would be beyond the scope of an officer unfamiliar with the locality and unsupported by local opinion. As an illustration of the transformation that has taken place since the grim enforcement days of the eighteen-seventies, it may be interesting to note that at Christmas time the good welfare officer is usually first choice for the role of Father Christmas at the innumerable children's parties organized in the schools at this festive season.

The golden key to efficient school attendance administration is the annual house to house census. It is the only way of ensuring, so far as is humanly possible, that no child of compulsory school age is overlooked; and it is remarkable in these days when population is very mobile how often the census brings to light little truants who would otherwise have escaped attention. But it serves other valuable purposes when it is well done; it constitutes a kind of social survey that is helpful throughout the ensuing year for dealing with school accommodation and kindred questions. It enables the local authority to keep its map of the distribution of child population up-to-date: and it shows what children there are under school age, and what schools their parents are likely to select for them. For example, while one may know from the registers of birth how many children have been born in the district, it is only the welfare officer who can tell you from his census whether they will be going to county, Church of England or Catholic schools. Nor can anyone tell you quite so accurately as the welfare officer the 'real' distance from house to school; he knows all the short cuts, the bus stopping places and so on. And he knows when families move from that district, thus enabling a speedy notice of the removal to be sent to the local authority of the area in which the new home is situated.

It is important that the local welfare officer should be a man or woman of a friendly and helpful disposition. In his census visitation and in other ways he calls on everyone, and in his locality is thus the best known of all the local education autho-

rity's officers. Indeed he is the only officer known to many parents, and they are apt to judge the attitude of the local education authority by his behaviour towards them. Thus he plays almost the role of an ambassador in his little kingdom, and on his good diplomacy much depends. Parents consult him about their educational problems and, if he is good at his job, he develops an aptitude for dealing with their questions. He acquires a skill in distinguishing between the queries he can properly dispose of, and those that are best referred to the Education Office. For this reason, it is desirable that he should have an encyclopaedic knowledge of local educational facilities and some background of general educational policy. It is with this object that some of the more enterprising local education authorities arrange annual 'refresher' courses for their welfare officers, at which they can hear the views of experts about recent developments in the different branches of the education service. How helpful it is, for example, if a mother tells him that she is worried about her baby's hearing, that he should know about the procedure under the Education Act of 1944 which enables that baby once he reaches the age of two to be medically examined with a view to special treatment, if necessary.

While it is his duty, when dealing with the few unco-operative parents, to ensure the enforcement of the law of school attendance, the welfare officer does not nowadays approach the parent in an aggressive spirit. On the contrary, his aim is to convince the parents of the value of education and to get them to see that by failing to send their children to school regularly they are depriving them of what is their birthright. Not infrequently truancy on the part of the children is a symptom of strained relations between husband and wife; when such a situation exists, the welfare officer may find his diplomatic skill stretched to its full capacity and he will be fortunate if he avoids widening the breach. But whatever surprises the visit may bring, the welfare officer usually fulfils his main purpose, that of persuading the parents to see that their children attend school regularly in future.

When however persuasion fails, the local welfare officer has reluctantly to report accordingly to the superintendent, and the case proceeds along more formal lines. A warning letter signed by the Chief Education Officer [see Appendix A(1)] is sent to the parent, and if that has no effect he is invited to attend before the local school attendance committee [see Appendix A(2)]. As a rule, this committee has a rota of members who take it in turn to attend; and thus the parent has an opportunity of stating his case without formality before three or four public represen-



tatives. Sometimes the discussion before the rota takes a very human turn, and the parents go home with a change of heart and determined to see that the law is obeyed in future. But if the parent does not attend, or if the irregularity continues, a further and stronger warning is sent either by registered post or personally delivered by the welfare officer. If that also is without effect, a final warning is delivered personally by the welfare officer, and the parent is urged to change his ways and invited to sign an undertaking that he will send his child to a suitable school with due regularity [Appendix A(3)]. If however the parent is still obdurate, the School Attendance Order prescribed by the Act [Appendix A(4)] is issued, naming the particular school to which the parent must send his child. If that, too, fails to have the desired effect, the parent is prosecuted, and the Magistrates decide whether or not to impose a penalty, the maximum amount of which is prescribed by law.

The 'explanations' given for irregular school attendance vary from district to district, and from time to time; there are fashions in excuses as in most other human foibles and to some extent they reflect the social characteristics of their period. The following may be regarded as typical:

- (1) *Help required at home.* Mother is in poor health, and there is a large family. How can she manage unless one or more of the children lend a hand with the housework? (This excuse has been pleaded in one form or another from 1870 onwards. It often touches the hearts of the Committee members, who have sometimes to be reminded of the law, and of the injustice being done to the child.)
- (2) *Someone must do the shopping.* Both parents are out at work all day; shops close before they return; people have to queue for certain goods at particular times. 'How can we manage,' say the parents, 'if we do not keep one of them from school to do the queuing?'
- (3) *Truancy* on the part of the child constitutes one of the most difficult problems. Sometimes the parents are taken completely by surprise when they hear that their children have not been attending school; and when this is the case, it is often found that they have very little influence over their children, perhaps as a result of apathy or indifference. When children are completely 'out of control', it is the practice in the more serious cases to bring the children before the juvenile court. If the magistrates think fit, they can then order them to be sent to an approved school (that is, a residential school for the reform of delinquent children) or they can make an order, placing them under

the care of the local authority, who will find suitable foster parents for them or place them in a children's home. Local authorities and magistrates are, however, usually reluctant to remove a child from his parents, for they regard parental affection, however misguided, as a vital element in the upbringing of the young. Truancy, all too often, proves to be the first step on the road to juvenile crime, and care is taken to check it in its early stages. Here, as in so many school attendance problems, close co-operation between the head teacher and the welfare officer can be of great value; and it is also sometimes desirable to invoke the aid of the child guidance experts who by diagnosing the cause of a child's absenteeism can suggest a cure for it.

#### THE EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS

Nothing conduces more to habits of irregular or late attendance than the employment of children before and after the school session; local education authorities are required to make bye-laws regulating and restricting this practice. Such bye-laws normally prohibit the employment of children below the age of thirteen, and forbid their participation in certain occupations deemed to be physically or morally harmful to them. Here, for example, is a typical list of prohibited employments:

- (1) As a lather boy, or in a similar occupation, in a barber's or hairdresser's shop.
- (2) In the kitchen, scullery or washhouse of any hotel, cook shop, fried fish shop, eating house, or refreshment room.
- (3) In any billiards or bagatelle saloon, or other place licensed for games or in any registered club.
- (4) In or in connexion with the sale of intoxicating liquors, except in places where such liquors are sold exclusively in sealed vessels.
- (5) In selling programmes or refreshments or other articles, or in selling or taking checks or tickets, or in shifting scenery, in any theatre, music hall, concert room, picture theatre or cinema, or other place of public entertainment.
- (6) In collecting or sorting rags or refuse.
- (7) As a window cleaner.
- (8) In any premises or fairground or other place used wholly or partly for the purpose of public amusement by means of automatic machines, mutoscopes, shooting ranges, games of chance or skill, or other similar devices.
- (9) In any slaughterhouse.



- (10) In or in connexion with any horse racecourse or dog racecourse or track or other place where any like sport is carried on, or in or in connexion with any business conducted therein.
- (11) In or in connexion with any boxing or wrestling booth or any other place where boxing or wrestling is carried on or in or in connexion with any business conducted therein.
- (12) In any agricultural work involving heavy strain and, in particular, in extracting sugar beet crops from the ground.

The most usual employment out of school hours is in the delivery of newspapers or milk; but this also is carefully regulated by bye-law. It is customary, for example, to allow employment on a school day for these purposes only between the hours of 7 a.m. and 8 a.m.,

There are also elaborate rules governing the employment of children as actors in the theatre and as performers in other entertainments : and the Ministry of Education issues a booklet of suggestions for those in charge of such children. No child can be so employed without a licence issued by the local education authority, and before the licence is issued a satisfactory undertaking has to be given to the effect that the child will receive a suitable education either in a local school or from a governess. The governess has to be approved by the local education authority, as has also the matron in whose charge the children will be when on tour or wherever they may be performing. There are also regulations designed to ensure that the children of parents living in canal boats receive a satisfactory education; the whole intention of the law being that every child, wherever he may be, shall receive an education appropriate to his age, aptitude and ability.

## CONCLUSIONS

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Experience of an educational problem in one country can too easily be regarded as wholly relevant to the same problem in other countries. For education is susceptible both to time and place, and while comparisons have their value, it is important when applying them not to forget the differentials of tradition and various social, political and economic factors. Still, as Matthew Arnold showed when he studied the problem of compulsory education in Europe as a preparation for its consideration by the English Parliament, the comparative method has its uses if discerningly employed. It may be helpful, therefore, to suggest certain conclusions which seem to follow from the history of compulsory education in England.

Of our political thinkers, few if any have had such influence on our conduct of affairs as Edmund Burke, and one of his principal contentions was that you cannot legislate effectively in advance of public opinion. 'As a law directed against the mass of the nation,' he argued, 'has not the nature of a reasonable institution, so neither has it the authority: for in all forms of government the people is the true legislator; and whether the immediate and instrumental cause of the law be a single person or many, the remote and efficient cause is the consent of the people, either actual or implied; and such consent is absolutely essential to its validity.' If you accept the view that a reasonable measure of public support is necessary before you can introduce a fundamental social reform, it becomes of interest to recall how in England opinion was prepared for the acceptance of compulsory education.

In the process of preparation, there appear to have been three principal factors, namely:

- (1) The awakening of the public conscience about the rights of childhood by some of the great Victorian prophets, e.g., Charles Dickens, Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, Charles Kingsley and Matthew Arnold.
- (2) Commissions of Enquiry, e.g., The Newcastle Commission.
- (3) Official memoranda, e.g., Matthew Arnold's Comparative Study of the practice of compulsory education.



(4) Debates in Parliament.

(5) As a final stage, local experiments by some of the School Boards created by the Elementary Education Act of 1870. The bye-law procedure authorized by the Act of 1870 had much to commend it. It enabled:

- (1) A beginning to be made at once by those areas which had a sufficiency of teachers and accommodation.
- (2) Experience to be obtained of the administrative and legal problems involved in applying compulsion. (Advantage was taken of this experience six years later in the Act of 1876.)
- (3) The practicability of compulsory education to be proved, and its social significance to be demonstrated.

This pilot effort by the more advanced areas also had a stimulating effect on those in which school accommodation was inadequate; it roused them to build new schools as speedily as possible so as to get level with their more progressive rivals. Education in England owes much to local initiative and enterprise, and some of our best achievements—e.g., the school health service, the school meals service, the nursery school movement and much else—owe their origin to local pioneering.

Throughout the early discussions on compulsory education the crucial administrative issues were (a) teacher supply, and (b) school accommodation. It was always appreciated that it would be the height of folly to compel parents to send their children to school if there was no room for them; and it was recognized that precipitate action of that kind could only lead to disillusionment and, as the Newcastle Commission contended, to a reaction against education. Hence the decision to proceed first by local bye-laws, and to postpone the application of universal compulsion until there was at least a bare sufficiency of teachers and accommodation.

In a problem like compulsory education there is always at the outset the task of steering a wise course between the Scylla of the enthusiast who sees no difficulties and the Charybdis of the pessimist who sees nothing else. Our nineteenth-century legislators dealt with this dilemma by a policy of gradualism: permitting compulsion in areas which had the schools and the teachers but postponing universal compulsion until the less advanced areas had 'filled the gaps'. It is worth noting that the interval between the first stage—compulsion by local option—and the second stage—universal compulsion—was not more than ten years.

On the other hand, when confronted after 1944 with the somewhat analogous problem of raising the school-leaving age, our Ministry took a completely different line. Although this

extra year plus the increased birth-rate involved the task of providing about a million school places and training about 70,000 new teachers, it was decided to make a bold emergency effort and the task was soon accomplished. But it is necessary to remember that this could not have been done without central planning, nor would the extra school year have been so readily accepted if there had not been built up through the years a healthy public opinion, generally favourable to this extension of the period of compulsory education.

The question whether education that is compulsory should also be free is one that usually arises when universal education is under consideration. It will have been noted that in England the view has been taken that compulsory education should be free, and this was confirmed in 1944, when the question arose again in a new form as a result of the provision of secondary education.

One of the most interesting features of compulsory education in England, however, has been the evolution of the school attendance officer, and it may well be that there is something of general application to learn from this. What has brought about the remarkable change of emphasis in his function: with enforcement the predominant note in the late nineteenth century and today all the stress on parental co-operation and the well-being of the school child? If anyone could observingly distil from the currents and cross-currents of our educational history the answer to that question, he would assuredly provide guidance of some value to anyone administering compulsory education in any part of the world. It is difficult to be sure what the factors are which have wrought this transformation, more difficult still to discriminate between those of strictly local significance and those which might be expected to have a general validity. But the attempt is worth making even if the assessment is scarcely better than conjecture.

There can be little doubt that economic circumstances have had something to do with the change. When school attendance officers first embarked on their formidable task, they had to deal with parents whose wages were low; it is little wonder that many of them viewed with hostility officials who came to force the little breadwinners of the household into school. Since 1870 there has been a gradual redistribution of wealth, and since 1939 there has been full employment. This has had the effect of making school attendance much more acceptable to the parents and has made many of them ambitious for their children. It is important, however, not to overstate the significance of the wage factor; for parents with low wages have often, and at great



sacrifice, been outstanding in their zeal for their children's education and well-being.

Another factor of some influence has been the change in social relationships. In 1870 the cleavage between the governing classes and the rest of the community was wide: and it was natural for the poor parents to feel that compulsory education was merely another of several social injustices—an additional burden that 'they' had imposed on 'us'. This attitude was stimulated by the restrictive character of the education provided, its narrow curriculum, the barrack-like schools, the large classes, and the general atmosphere of regimentation. It took some time for it to be widely recognized that education was for the benefit of the children and that it was a very human right to which they were by law entitled. As the conception of elementary education widened and its quality improved, parents became more and more appreciative of the teaching their children were receiving and there was a gradual decline in the number of those who needed the spur of a compulsory law to induce them to send their children regularly to school. Moreover as discipline became more humane and teaching methods more interesting, children ceased to go 'unwillingly to school'. It can therefore be claimed that the problem of compulsory education is largely solved when the school is able as a truly educative community to give its customers a fair deal.

In England the development of various auxiliary services has done much to render school attendance palatable to parents and children alike; while the school health service, by greatly reducing the incidence of illness, has helped to diminish those distressing periods of absence which so interrupt the course of education and are a potent cause of 'backwardness'. School meals, the morning glass of milk, and the provision of transport for children living beyond walking distance from school have contributed much to good attendance; and parents have been greatly assisted in the upbringing of their children by measures for social security, including a system of children's maintenance allowances.

Much depends on the attitude of society to education and to the child. When compulsory attendance was introduced in England, there was no widespread belief in the value of education nor was the standard in the majority of elementary schools much above literacy. It is not surprising therefore that enforcement was necessary in order to get parents to send their children to an institution for which they had no great regard, and to get children to participate in an 'education' which they did not enjoy. Generalizations are dangerous; but it seems reasonable to claim that as society becomes educated the need for compulsion declines,

and that as schools become true centres of education the machinery of enforcement becomes less and less necessary.

But most important of all is the attitude of society to the child. For many centuries the English child was not shown much kindness by his elders. It was the practice in mediæval education to rule children by the rod, and to govern them by rules and penalties. Anselm, the famous Archbishop of Canterbury, was one of the few to protest in those days against the cruelty which, he said, made boys hate their masters and everything connected with learning. This tradition continued both in the home and the school to comparatively recent times. There was undoubtedly much cruelty in the domestic employment of children in weaving and other crafts before the age of machinery; and when with the advent of steam and other sources of power, children came to be employed in factory, workshop and mine the main difference was that the severity shown in domestic employment within the home became the organized cruelty of the mass employment of children. What accentuated the cruelty of the age of machinery was that for the first time in our history most of the children were brought up under urban conditions; up to 1750 most of them lived in the country, while today eight out of ten live in towns.

We have seen how gradually through the nineteenth and present centuries the employment of children has been reduced and stringently regulated. This reflects a marked change in the general attitude to children, and in home and school there has been a truly dramatic transformation from the severity customary in the earlier part of the last century. It was, for example, usual to hear parents and teachers say during the last war, 'Whatever comes, I try to make sure that the children don't suffer'. And it was but a reflection of public opinion in this country that when the Government first presented their proposals for the measure that became the Education Act of 1944, they began the official statement that they laid before Parliament with the words: 'The Government's purpose in putting forward the reforms described in this Paper is to secure for children a happier childhood and a better start in life'.

There has in the last twenty or thirty years been a steady growth of interest in child development and the psychology and physiology of childhood and adolescence. Much of the knowledge of the experts, translated into simple terms, has found its way into the home, and it has greatly helped to produce an understanding of behaviour problems and to promote generally an interest in and a kindly attitude to children. The press lends its encouragement to child study by articles on the subject, and is quick to



draw attention to any instance of cruelty brought before the courts. As a result of a serious case of cruelty by a foster parent and the publicity it received, the Government set up in 1945 a Committee 'to inquire into existing methods of providing for children who from loss of parents or from any cause whatever are deprived of a normal home life'. As a result of its report, Children's Committees have been set up by all County and County Borough Councils, and in every area there is now a Children's Officer responsible for the well-being of all children who as orphans or for some other cause lack a parent's care. Sympathetic boarding-out officers, specially trained for the task, are appointed to select and supervise suitable foster homes, and as some of the children live in children's homes provided by the local authority or a voluntary association, matrons and house mothers are given special training in child care to fit them for service with these children and to create a happy family atmosphere in these homes.

It will be seen, therefore, that England has travelled a long way from that bleak age in which her children had to climb chimneys and drag coal trucks at the pit-head. Instead there now prevails a general desire to ensure for all children, as a human right, the joy of a happy upbringing; and this fact has wrought a complete change in the significance of compulsory education. This transformation seems to point to the conclusion that when a society is well-disposed to its children and believes in education, the problem of enforcing school attendance becomes mainly one of dealing wisely with the maladjusted child and remedying the anti-social conduct of problem families.

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## APPENDIX A

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### 1. Examples of letters sent to parents when persuasion has failed.

City of ..... Education Committee

#### NOTICE TO PARENTS

Scholars who are physically fit are required by law to attend School every time the School is open.

If a child is late, it has to be considered absent and all absences, either through non-attendance or lateness, must be reported by the Head Teacher to the Committee.

In all cases of a child's irregular attendance at School, the parent is liable to be summoned before the Education Committee, and if the irregular attendance is considered to be without sufficient cause and is persisted in, the parent is then summoned to appear before the Magistrates.

(Signed)  
Chief Education Officer.

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\_\_\_\_\_ School

\_\_\_\_\_ 19

To M \_\_\_\_\_

Your Child \_\_\_\_\_ was absent  
from School this \_\_\_\_\_ noon. Will you please state the reason  
below, and return this note to the Teacher?

\_\_\_\_\_  
School Welfare Officer.

#### PARENT'S ANSWER

CITY OF . . . EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
EDUCATION OFFICES,

---

Dear Sir/Madam,

I regret to say that I have been informed that your child——

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is attending school irregularly.

Please note that unless the attendance in future is both regular and punctual, the Education Committee will have to take proceedings against you before the Magistrates.

Yours faithfully,  
Chief Education Officer.

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2. Examples of letters relating to the interview of parents at meetings of the Local School Attendance Committee.

CITY OF . . . EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
EDUCATION OFFICES,

Dist No. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 19

Dear Sir/Madam,

I understand that your child(ren) named below, has (have) recently been irregular in attendance at school. As it is necessary for the Committee to investigate children's absences from school, you are invited to attend personally at the

SCHOOL,

at 7-0 p.m. in the evening of Tuesday, the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 19\_\_\_\_\_ to explain to the Committee the cause of this irregularity.

If you are unable to attend personally, you may send another adult person to represent you.

I am instructed to inform you that if a personal appearance is not made or if the reasons for absence are unsatisfactory, it may be necessary for the Committee to take further steps to secure regular attendance at school.

Yours faithfully,

To the Parent or Guardian of

---

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COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

CITY OF . . . EDUCATION COMMITTEE

EDUCATION OFFICES,

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am informed that you did not attend, as requested, before the Attendance Committee at —

\_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_  
on \_\_\_\_\_ respecting  
your child's irregular attendance at school. I should be glad if you would send to these Offices a written explanation of your child's absence from school

If, in future, your child's attendance at school continues to be irregular without reasonable cause, it will be necessary to take further proceedings.

Yours faithfully,

3. Example of letter of final warning delivered personally by the welfare officer, and of form of undertaking that he asks the parent to sign if he shows willingness to comply with the law in future.

CITY OF . . . EDUCATION COMMITTEE

EDUCATION OFFICES,

Dear Sir/Madam,

*Education Act, 1944.*

I have been instructed to give you notice that you are required under the terms of the Education Act, 1944, to satisfy the Education Committee, not later than 14 days from the date of this notice, that your child is receiving efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. I shall be glad to be informed accordingly as to the arrangements you propose to make for your child's education.

The officer who calls with this note will be in a position to advise you as to a suitable school for your child.

Yours faithfully,

The Parents or Guardians of:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
I, the undersigned, \_\_\_\_\_ parent  
of \_\_\_\_\_ do hereby promise and agree to  
arrange for my child to receive full-time education suitable to her age,  
ability, and aptitude as a registered pupil at

\_\_\_\_\_ School

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness' signature \_\_\_\_\_  
and designation \_\_\_\_\_

Address of parent \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Copy of School Attendance Order Regulations, 1944, prescribing the form in which a School Attendance Order shall be served on a parent by a Local Education Authority.

## STATUTORY RULES AND ORDERS

1944 No. 1470

## EDUCATION, ENGLAND AND WALES

*School Attendance Order Regulations, 1944*

The School Attendance Order Regulations, 1944, dated December 29, 1944, made by the Minister of Education under section 37 of the Education Act, 1944 (7 et 8 Geo. 6. c. 31).

1. In pursuance of section 37 of the Education Act, 1944, the form set out in the Schedule hereto is hereby prescribed as the form in which a school attendance order shall be served upon the parent of a child of compulsory school age by a Local Education Authority.
2. These Regulations may be cited as the School Attendance Order Regulations, 1944.

Given under the Official Seal of the Minister of Education this 29th day of December, 1944.

(L.S.)

*M. G. Holmes,*

Secretary to the Ministry of Education.

## SCHEDULE.

EDUCATION ACT, 1944.

*School Attendance Order.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Local Education Authority.

Whereas \_\_\_\_\_ (hereinafter called 'the child') is a child of compulsory school age in the area of the above-named Authority:

And whereas you \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ the parent\* of the child, have failed to satisfy the Authority in accordance with the requirements of the notice served on you by the Authority on \_\_\_\_\_ that the child is receiving efficient full-time education suitable to his [her] age, ability and aptitude either by regular attendance at school or otherwise:

And whereas, in the opinion of the Authority, it is expedient that the child should attend school:

Now therefore you are hereby required to cause the child forthwith to become a registered pupil at the following school:—

\_\_\_\_\_ being the school selected by you [determined by a direction of the Minister of Education] as the school to be named in this Order.

[Insert full name and address of school; and omit the whole or part of the following words as the case requires].

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_

Local Education Authority  
(County Council) (County Borough Council)

Dated \_\_\_\_\_

[\* In this Order the expression 'parent' in relation to the child, includes a guardian and every person who has the actual custody of the child.]



APPENDIX B

Example of form used by District welfare officers when summarizing the results of an annual census or survey of a district within the area of a Local Education Authority.

House to House Canvass of District \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Houses visited . . . . .				
Number of District Children in Attendance at:—				
County Secondary Grammar Schools in the City . .				
„	Technical	„	„	.
„	Selective Central	„	„	.
„	Secondary	„	„	.
„	All-age	„	„	.
„	Primary	„	„	.
„	Nursery	„	„	.
Voluntary Selective Central				„
„	Secondary	„	„	.
„	All-age	„	„	.
„	Primary	„	„	.
Day Special Schools for Educationally Sub-normal Children in the City.				
Residential	„	„	„	„
„	„	Physically Handicapped	„	„
Day	„	„	„	„
Residential Colleges and Schools . . . . .				
Direct Grant Schools . . . . .				
Independent Schools . . . . .				
Home Tuition . . . . .				
Schools other than Colleges and Boarding Schools outside the City				
Residential Colleges and Boarding Schools				„
Residential Schools and Homes				„
Approved Schools and Remand Homes				„
Schools for the Deaf				„
„	„	Blind	„	„
„	„	Physically Handicapped	„	„
„	„	Educationally Sub-normal	„	„
Total				_____

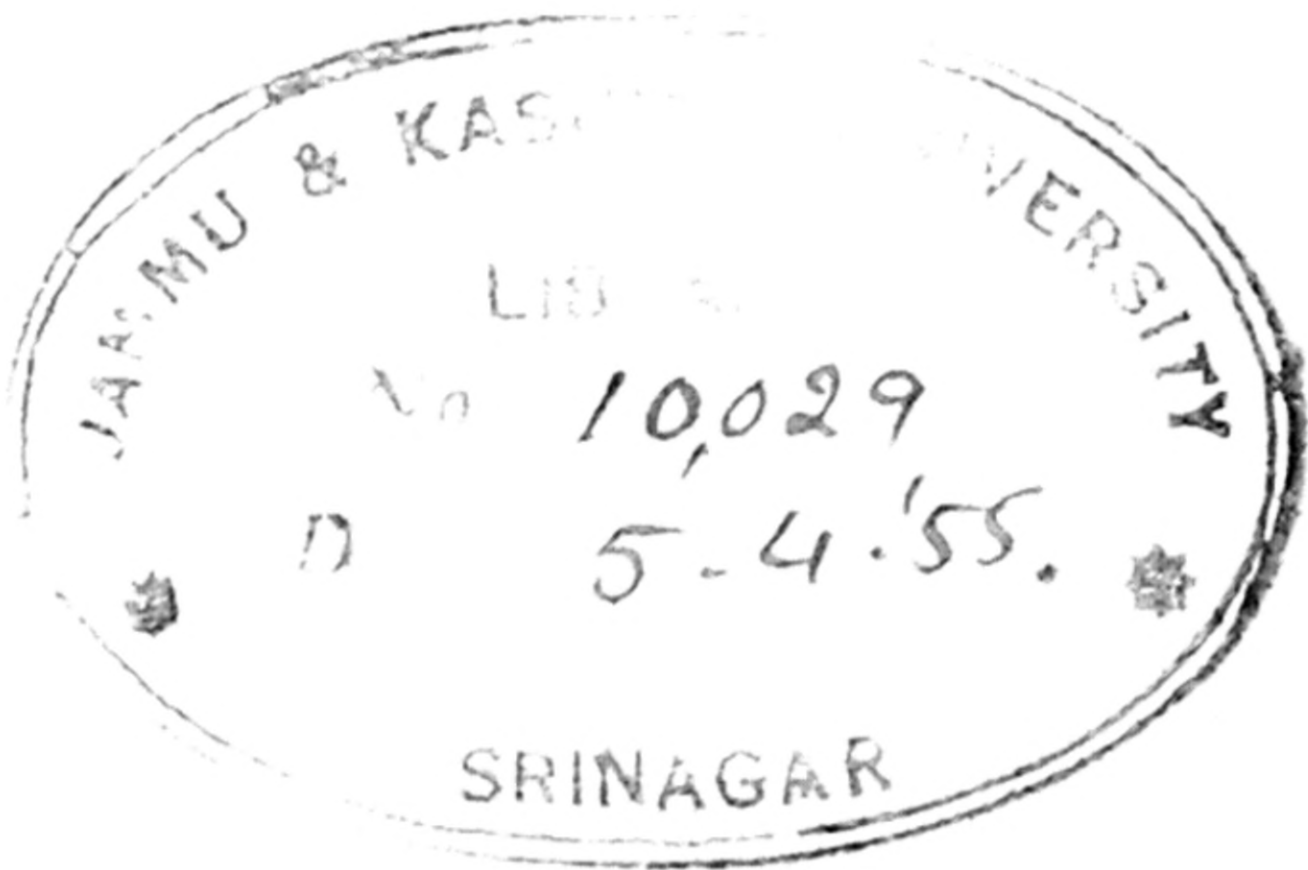
Children found not attending school (5 to 15 years):—

Deaf . . . . .	
Blind . . . . .	
Physically Handicapped . . . . .	
Educationally Sub-normal . . . . .	
Speech Defect (not due to deafness) . . . . .	
Sick cases in hand and receiving attention . . . . .	
Due to parental neglect . . . . .	
Total	<hr/>
	<hr/>

Children under 5 years:—

Between 4 and 5 years . . . . .	
„ 3 and 4 „ . . . . .	
„ 2 and 3 „ . . . . .	
„ 1 and 2 „ . . . . .	
Under 1 year . . . . .	
Total	<hr/>
	<hr/>

Signature of Officer\_\_\_\_\_







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